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Exploring the Motivations of Millennials Opting for Temple Stays in India

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Millennials are the most promising consumer segment of the tourism industry and the fast pace of development and emergence of newer trends has led to a drastic change in consumer behaviour. Temple Stays are emerging as a significant source of tourism for sites that are transforming traditional religious practices into a complete hybrid of leisure and recreation. Considering this, the current research is framed to analyse the factors that motivate Millennials to undertake spiritual tourism activities, with special focus on Temple Stay programs at various Buddhist sites / monasteries in India and the revisit intentions of Millennials. The research is qualitative in nature - semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually with suitable respondents. Only those respondents who have stayed for 7 days or more in temples-stays were targeted by using purposive sampling techniques. The data were analysed using NVivo (12) and in order to achieve the objectives of the study thematic and content analysis were applied. The study identifies four motivational factors for Temple Stays, including comprehensive learning, self-growth, harmonising with nature, and spirituality. Analysis also revealed that travel motivations have a significant impact on life satisfaction among Millennials tourists that further reflects their revisit intentions to Temple Stays. The results of the present study will be helpful in realising the emerging market segment of tourism which is Millennials. Also, the study helps to provide a theoretical contribution by reflecting on the overall relationship between the various dimensions of spiritual tourism, life satisfaction and intention to adopt spiritual tourism practices again.

Key Words: Millennials, Temple Stays, spirituality, revisit intention, life satisfaction

Introduction

The fast pace of development and emergence of newer trends has led to drastic changes in consumer behavior, where Millennials are the most promising consumer segment of the tourism industry. Sharpley and Sundaram (2005), through their study advocated that much emphasis has been placed on religion and tourism in the past and in fact significant relationships have been observed between the two, whereas the spiritual dimensions of tourism remain under-researched (Timothy & Conover, 2006). Connected to this latter concept, Temple Stays are emerging as a significant resource for tourism, and many sites are transforming their traditional religious practices into a complete hybrid of wellness and rejuvenation.

In fact, subjective wellbeing has become a concern for many nations. In 2010, The United Kingdom's then Prime Minister, David Cameron expressed concern regarding the wellbeing of citizens and directed the Office of National Statistics to conduct a survey related to the subjective well-being and life satisfaction of their citizens (Gov.UK, 2010). Further, many researchers (Noy, 2004; Voigt, Brown & Howat, 2011; Zahra & McIntosh, 2007; Desforges, 2000; Uriely 2005; King & Boyatzis, 2015) have explored and identified tourism experience as a source of self-transformation, therapeutic benefits, self-identity and life satisfaction, but the context has not received much attention through the lens of spirituality.

More specifically, the Millennial generation has been seen as determined to undertake travel activities for rejuvenation and psychological wellbeing (Patra, 2019). Writing in an online travel blog, Timms (2015) posited that 'increased awareness for work-related stress is encouraging tourists to consider more closely the prospect of wellness tourism'. In fact, such metaphysical issues are even affirmed by science (Miovic, 2004). Mechanisms that define the relationship between spirituality and wellbeing consist of emotional modulation and functionality in a given environment (Ramsay *et al.*, 2019). Dealing with this, Gill, Packer and Ballantyne (2018) define such environments as restorative as they effortlessly contribute towards engaging the attention of people. In this regard, spirituality influences the relationship between nature and phenomenal approaches towards the wellbeing of tourists (Kamitsis & Francis, 2013). It is thereby suggested that to increase emotional values like happiness and enhance the psychological prospects of life quality among the people (Whitford, Olver & Peterson, 2008), spiritual retreats and Temple Stay programmes should be offered within different cultural and religion contexts. Thus, Christian, Buddhist and Yoga retreat centres are found to serve tourists with opportunities and environments for reflection, self-awareness and wellbeing (Rodrigues & McIntosh, 2014). Considering this, the current research is framed to analyse the factors that motivate tourists especially Millennials to undertake spiritual tourism activities and adopt Temple Stay programmes and Spiritual retreats and to analyse their intentions to revisit.

Literature Review

Tourist motivations are largely reflective of leisure activities and interests (Bideci & Albayrak, 2016). Thus, understanding motivations helps to understand many behavioural aspects of tourists (Prebensen *et al.*, 2013). Subjective wellbeing as a factor is gaining significant focus by researchers nowadays (Albuquerque *et al.*, 2012, Silva *et al.*, 2015; Soukiazis & Ramos, 2016; Houlden *et al.*, 2019); accordingly, Iwasaki *et al.* (2005; 2014) examine leisure activities as a source of relief against stress and supporting the promotion of overall wellbeing of people. On the other hand, Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan, 1995; Stack & Shultis, 2013) has been developed and linked with psychological and cognitive well-being and life satisfaction among tourists, often induced by the natural environment. Thus, surroundings and environment have been considered as important factors for driving change and positivity

among tourists (Noy, 2004; Vishkin *et al.*, 2016; 2019), and therefore, people often seek travel activities when they are motivated for salvation, spiritual and mental rejuvenation (Timothy, 2011).

Religious tourism and pilgrimage have been explained as travel activity undertaken by people to destinations or events of a sacred environment for participating in rituals and ceremonies of religious significance (Chun *et al.*, 2018; Shinde, 2020). Linking religious tourism and spirituality, de la Torre *et al.* (2016), identified motivations for participating in religious activities and spiritual contemplation (Sharpley 2009; Raj & Griffin, 2015). In other literature, religious tourism activities and motivations are expanded to encompass other issues like culture, spirituality, heritage and landscape patterns (Shinde and Rizello, 2014; Rahman *et al.*, 2017; Geary 2018; Robina Ramírez, and Pulido Fernández, 2018), which generally provide insight into tourists' intentions and decisions to travel to particular destinations or sites (Drule *et al.*, 2015; Wang *et al.*, 2016; Amaro *et al.*, 2018; Kim & Kim, 2018; Terzidou *et al.*, 2018; Kim, Kim & King, 2020). Spiritual tourism (as opposed to travel focused on the religious rituals of particular faiths) has been found to induce therapeutic experiences (Zahra & McIntosh, 2007; Olsen, 2013) thereby providing rejuvenation (Voigt, Brown & Howat, 2011) and life satisfaction for travellers (Yoon & Lee, 2006; Uriely *et al.*, 2011).

More specifically, spirituality is seen as being linked to a perceived identity and less related to a sense of formal religiosity (Levi & Kocher, 2013; Ambrosio, 2015; Griffin & Raj, 2018). This has led to a change in traditional pilgrimage travel destinations which are now being recognised to possess heterogeneous properties (Kaufman 2005; Collins-Kreiner, 2018; Terzidou, 2020). Spirituality is elusive (Coyle, 2002; Narayanasamy, 2014; Lepherd, 2015) but it is now seen as a source for adopting more transformative practices (Schumacher, Zehrer & Schobersberger, 2011). Accordingly, people who engage with religious and spiritual experiences reflect more positive lifestyles as compare to others (Vishkin *et al.*, 2019; Manning *et al.*, 2019; Sulphey, 2020). In consideration of the motives above, and the resulting spiritual requirements, religious and spiritual centres are being developed more for tourists (Abbate & Nuovo, 2013; Amaro & Di Nuovo, 2018; Iliev, 2020). Norman and Pokorny (2017:203) explaining spiritual tourism, describe it as a

reflexive well-being intervention driven by the sense that some aspect of everyday life needs fixing or improving, and oriented towards the space of non-work and leisure away from home where such problems can be given full attention.

Within the sphere of spiritual tourism, Temple Stays have created a new brand related to spirituality and wellness, providing such programs and packages in a different and innovative way. Offering an increasingly refined product, Temple Stays are contributing in a creative way towards both religiosity and spiritual tourism (Kaplan, 2010; Bae, Lee & Chick, 2019) thus, refining transformative travel experiences (Huang et al., 2020). Regarding the psychological motives of travellers, it has been noted that they adopt travel either for seeking for, or escaping a certain environment (Kim, Chiang & Tang, 2017). Temple Stays, provide travellers with environments and living practices, underpinned with transformative experiences (Ross, Hur & Hoffman, 2019). Programs offered by Temple Stays are not only delivering facilities for religious activities but are equipped to provide facilities like meditation and overall wellness (OECD, 2009). In fact, Temple Stays serve as retreats that give rejuvenation and opportunities to people for developing their good health through spiritual actions (Kelly, 2012; Heintzman, 2013).

Where Buddhist temples were previously only serving as religious centres, they are also now establishing traditions of meditative and other practice as techniques associated with religious and spiritual development (Norman & Pokorny, 2017). In this respect, it has also been observed that academics and experts are trying to explore the tourism dimensions of spiritual travel and linkages with nature and ecological aspects that can endorse positive psychology among tourists (Azara, Michopoulou, Niccolini, Taff & Clarke, 2018; Buckley, 2020). Choe, Blazey & Mitas (2015) in their case study on Buddhist temples (Chinatown, Los Angeles) observed that tourists were highly motivated by the tranquil atmosphere and enjoy being there as this provided them with mental relaxation and they feel stress free. Similarly, Norman (2011) in his research conducted on spiritual tourism in Rishikesh (India), observed that the intentions of the people are highly driven by the motivations attend yoga and meditation programs and retreats as these practices help them boosting sense of control, and are found to be associated with better health and over all wellbeing in peaceful locations (Hartog & Gow, 2005). Such

psychological variables act as factors for explaining behavioural intentions among tourists which lead them to revisit a spiritual destination and repurchase the services (Baloglu, 2000; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Many Buddhist temples and societies, specifically in western societies, are being promoted for their pragmatic and evaluative transformation practices (Eddy, 2012; McKenzie, 2012), and this has particularly been observed with Millennials as they are frequent travellers, are self-analytical and look for experiences where they can experience self-realisation (Shim, Gehrt & Siek, 2005).

Contemporary Buddhist Temple Stays are providing sessions for emotion regulation and self-control through various meditative practice linked with overall therapeutic benefits (Wallace, 2006; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Song et al., 2015). In engaging with these activities, intentions to travel are driven by wellness and health concerns (Smith & Puczkó, 2015; Nawijn et al., 2013; Smith & Diekmann, 2017). Linking with natural elements (Chun & Kim, 2012), Temple Stays are aligned with motivational dimensions such as self-growth and regeneration, relaxation and cultural and spiritual inclination (Choe, Blazey & Mitas, 2015; Wang, Chen & Huang, 2015). This further explains and defines the actions and determines the final behaviours of travellers (Jang et al., 2015; Konu & Laukkanen, 2009).

Research Methodology

Primarily, this study analysed the factors that motivate Millennials to undertake spiritual tourism activities, with special focus on Temple Stay programs at various Buddhist sites/monasteries in India. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, qualitative research was implemented. The type of research enables a researcher to obtain in-depth understanding of information like people's thoughts, values, beliefs, emotions, feelings, perceptions, behaviours and motivations, which cannot be expressed and understood in the form of statistics (Berkwits & Inui, 1998; Abdelhadi, Foster, Whysall & Rawwas, 2013). Adopting a qualitative approach can be justified by the fact that the study is exploratory in nature. Semi-structured interviews were scheduled and conducted with the respondents between the months of March and August 2020. Some interviews were conducted face to face, while others were scheduled virtually due to Covid-19 lockdowns. For this study semi-structured interviews were chosen, as they enable a researcher to gather 'rich' data to examine particular

research questions and to expand and inspect the concept under study (Bebbie, 1990), providing comprehensive explanations in the responses (Carey, 2013). According to Hennink *et al.* (2017), for a 'richly textured' inspection of a problem at hand, it is advisable that a minimum of 24 interviews with suitable respondents should be conducted. However, in qualitative research, the sample size for a study is also decided by the saturation point. This is a point at which no new pattern or information can be obtained from the data. Following this model, data were obtained from a sample of 27 respondents, out of which 17 were males and 10 were females. All of the interviews were conducted in English. Ethical practices were considered before conducting the interviews and consent was sought from the respondents. All of the 27 respondents were engaged in Temple Stays or had experienced the practice in the recent past at various Buddhist sites / monasteries in the regions of Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, and Uttarakhand in India. In order to identify interviewees, purposive and snowball sampling techniques were adopted to select the respondents who came from several countries of the world.

On the basis of available literature, a set of interview questions was prepared to gather accurate and relevant information from the respondents. This consisted of open-ended questions which focused on understanding the factors that motivate the Millennials to undertake spiritual tourism activities. The interviews were recorded and then later converted into written transcripts after which decisions were made about the level of detail to choose, data interpretation and data representation (Bailey, 2008). In the next step, thematic analysis was utilised to analyse the prepared transcripts – this identified and interpreted themes and patterns of meaning within the qualitative data collected by the researcher (Braun & Clarke 2006). Thematic analysis was performed with the help of Nvivo (12) which was useful in fulfilling the objectives of the study. Moreover, the secondary data for the study were assembled from various relevant research publications, studies and reports.

Data Analysis and Findings

While working with text, the first step in the data analysis is open coding (Strauss, 1987). It is this stage of data analysis which aims to identify, categorise, and label the text from the transcripts. The codes can be linked to a line, a sentence, a paragraph or a whole text. The next step of coding is known as the axial coding, in which

the researcher attempts to develop sub categories. At this point, open codes which seem interrelated are assembled together to create tentative statements of relationships between phenomena (Tan, Kung & Luh, 2013). The final step in the coding process is selective coding, which is more abstract in nature – this is the process of integrating all the sub categories into core categories. These categories have analytic power, due to their ability to describe and predict (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this research, 11 subcategories emerged, and these were later regrouped into 4 themes namely: Comprehensive Learning; Self-Growth; Harmonising with Nature and; Spirituality. These are illustrated as findings of the study in Table 1.

In addition to thematic analysis, content analysis was also applied in the study. Content analysis mainly focuses on the frequency of terms, words and phrases in text, and this method was applied to the transcripts. Content analysis is objective, systematic and quantitative in nature (Auster, 1956). Figure 1 is a word cloud representing the 10 keywords with the highest frequency. The words Experience, Mediation, Yoga, Spiritual, Peaceful, Skills, Nature, Relaxing, Peace and Healing were repeatedly used by respondents. This reinforces that the results of content analysis support the results of thematic analysis.

Discussion

Temple Stay has altered the perception and old-style role of Buddhist monasteries into a new form of leisure and recreational tourism that is more spiritual than religious in nature. This study identified four motivational factors for Temple Stay, including Comprehensive Learning, Self-Growth, Harmonising with Nature, Relaxation. Moreover, it was found that the four motivational factors did not differ on the basis of the respondents' gender. The comprehensive learning is an understanding of the key motivations amongst Millennials when opting for Temple Stays which help them in adopting new skills, knowledge and understanding of the world (Choe, Blazey & Mitas, 2015; Chun, Roh & Spralls, 2017). There are various activities which are taught in Temple Stay programs in India like cooking, tea ceremonies, Buddhist art painting and crafting, and yoga lessons. International tourists also aim to learn about a monk's life by attending various religious activities and reading sacred texts, while religiously motivated participants have more desire to understand and learn about the local culture (Shuo, Ryan, & Liu, 2009; Singh & Haigh, 2015).

Table 1a: Synthesis of Open Coding, Axial Coding and Selective Coding

| Open Codes (Generated from Data) | Axial Coding (Sub Categories) | Selective Coding (Themes / Categories) |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|
| <i>During my stay at the Buddhist Temple in Dharamshala, I got the opportunity to learn mindfulness and concentration. This had a huge impact on my daily life afterwards.</i> <i>I indulged in the Temple Stay experience with the intention of learning something new. I understood the true nature of learning with concentration and observation.</i> <i>Temple tour is not just about visiting the Buddhist temple, you also get to experience the Buddhism and culture. It opens doors for broadening your horizons.</i> | Cognitive Learning | Comprehensive Learning |
| <i>I haven't been able to mentally and emotionally cope with a crisis situation created by Covid-19 therefore, I have been staying in a Buddhist monastery where I learn sculpture, craft and make Buddhist paintings.</i> <i>During the stay at the temple, I got the opportunity to learn various Yoga techniques. This experience not only helped me personally but professionally too.</i> | Skill Learning | |
| <i>I love to meditate. I consciously meditate for a few minutes every day. The meditation sessions and yoga classes made me aware of my body and sense of touch.</i> <i>I had some of the healthiest and delicious meals during my time at the Temple Stay. The clean lifestyle encouraged me to adopt healthy eating habits and vegetarian food.</i> | Physical Learning | |
| <i>I believe that the experience of staying at the temple is a way of knowing this piece of life in a much better way than the way you currently know it. It helped me to fully understand the purpose of my life.</i> <i>Staying at the Buddhist temple certainly enhanced my quality of life and helped me to realise my dreams and aspirations.</i> | Self-Realisation | Self-Growth |
| <i>My observation is that the spiritual healing helped me and my partner to improve our relationship. It helped us to achieve emotional healing and deal with conflicts. I intend to repeat this unique experience in future.</i> <i>Spirituality helped me to connect with similar minded people and expand my support network. This fact cannot be overlooked that spiritual experiences help to connect with yourself and the world.</i> | Improved Relationships | |
| <i>What I have learned at my Temple Stay in Ladakh, is that a monk's life is peaceful, but it's not exactly as relaxing as laying on a beach for a day. I learnt dedication and self-discipline from a monk's daily life.</i> <i>A monk explained to me once that even the smallest piece of pepper is valuable. Now I am a bit more conscious of not wasting food, even if it seems like I have eaten a lot.</i> | Adaptability | |

It was found that self-growth is significant, as Millennials have an urge to understand themselves, self-reflect, contemplate and grow through unique experiences (Heintzman, 2009; McDonald & Schreyer, 1991; Wang, Chen, & Huang, 2015). One can relax both body and soul in the Zen ambience of Buddhist temples, while acquiring deep knowledge about the self and the meaning of life. Furthermore, Buddhist temples are situated in beautiful locations and one can be completely immersed in tranquillity. Nature-based recreation and leisure activity is a key attraction of Temple Stays since it enables the participants to connect with the natural world. Millennials want to spend time with nature, engaged in

various nature-based activities and Temple Stays provide ample opportunities to do this (Heintzman, 2009; Chun & Chong, 2011). Moreover, the Temple Stay offers a unique opportunity to live a simple and clean life away from the international participants' usual environment.

Various respondents expressed that they see India as a source of spirituality and spiritual activities like meditation, yoga, chanting and many more practices. All of these activities are relaxing in nature and provide relief from the stress and strain of everyday life. Hence, spirituality is one of the prime factors behind the inclinations of Millennials towards Temple Stay (Lee &

Table 1 (cont.): Synthesis of Open Coding, Axial Coding and Selective Coding

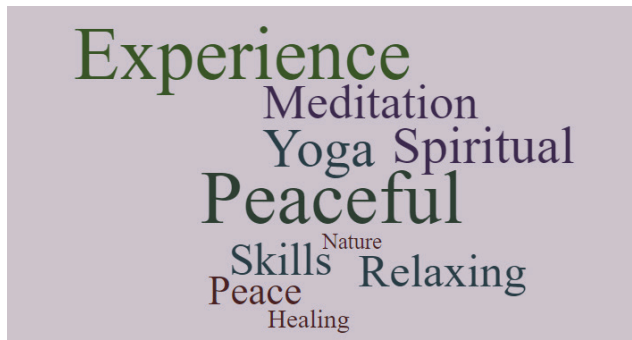
| Open Codes (Generated from Data) | Axial Coding (Sub Categories) | Selective Coding (Themes / Categories) |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|
| <p><i>I have always been inclined towards the natural environment and non-toxic tourism activities. Temple Stays give me an opportunity to indulge with nature and understand the delicate balance of nature around us.</i></p> <p><i>Although I have stayed at monasteries and temples many times, every time I learn something new about the importance of nature in Buddhism. The connection between Buddhism and nature is inseparable.</i></p> | Environmental Awareness | Harmonising with Nature |
| <p><i>The road to the temple eventually merges with the road to nature. The experience of Temple Stay allows us to breathe in the crisp, clean mountain morning air. This is a perfect way to start your day for nature loving tourists.</i></p> <p><i>Buddhism has a close relationship with nature. The monks prefer the solitude and tranquillity of distant mountain peaks over the noisy cities. The unique ambience of Temple Stays brought me not only closer to nature, but also to myself. This is one of the key reasons for my repeat visit to Temple Stay programs.</i></p> <p><i>The Temple Stay program is primarily about finding true happiness and clarity within ourselves. I have learnt to live in harmony with the universe and all its beings. I try to integrate the experience into my daily life.</i></p> | Being with Nature | |
| <p><i>The ceremonial chanting in praise of the Buddha and meditation is one of the amazing experiences in a Temple Stay. Meditation helped me a lot in getting rid of the stress.</i></p> <p><i>During my short Temple Stay I participated in meditation, spiritual conversation over tea, which gave you a new perspective towards life. I learnt to focus on present and controlling emotions.</i></p> | Meditation | Spirituality |
| <p><i>I experienced a one-day Temple Stay which included a temple tour, meditation, tea ceremony, gardening, lamp making and other activities. Overall, it was a peaceful experience.</i></p> <p><i>It has become very important for me personally to do painting, paper crafts and reading about the Buddhist culture. Involvement in various activities during Temple Stay can no doubt have a positive effect on your life.</i></p> | Peaceful Activities | |
| <p><i>Temple Stay is a life changing experience if you are looking for a time-out. This experience has definitely made me think about the origin of all beings.</i></p> <p><i>I was getting a lot of good words from friends about the Temple Stay experience. Indeed, it was the best way to break free from daily routine and connect with myself.</i></p> | Escape from Daily Life | |

Han, 2009; Percy, 2019; Herbert & Bullock, 2020). In these modern times people are looking for peace and a state of grace in life, and thus, spirituality can become a driver for tourism. (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005). The results of the study also note that many of the respondents highlighted their revisit intentions towards Temple Stays. The unique experience, visible gains, personal growth, improved relationships, new perspectives and many more benefits are some of the key reasons behind repeated visits of people who regularly indulge in Temple Stays. In other words, revisit intentions in Temple Stays are based on experiential satisfaction attained by the participants.

Future Implications

In the last decade, Temple Stays have emerged as an increasingly significant component of religious tourism destinations like India. This study provides an understanding of the motivations of Millennials for experiencing Temple Stays and the ways in which they satisfy their diverse needs through stay experiences. The results of the study enrich the available literature on push and pull theory by extending it to the setting of Temple Stays. To the best of our knowledge, this study is one of the first to examine the push motivations of Millennials

Figure 1: Word Cloud Based on Keywords from Content Analysis



Conclusion

This study identifies four motivational factors for Temple Stay, including: Comprehensive Learning, Self-growth, Harmonising with Nature, and Spirituality. In addition, the study revealed that travel motivations have significant impacts on life satisfaction among Millennial tourists that further reflects on their revisit intentions regarding Temple Stays. This study also provides insight for policy makers, temple managers, and marketing managers who develop Temple Stay experiences in the industry. The study will further help to understand how we can segment the market effectively and improve the targeting of potential Temple Stay participants. As Temple Stays are becoming increasingly popular for tourists (in addition to researchers and academics), it can be deduced that this unique experience can produce far more than cultural, educational and nature-based rejuvenation outcomes. Based on the experiences of Millennials, we argue that travellers are amazed to discover the spiritual nature of their experiences during a Temple Stay. While stress and depression are spreading like an epidemic amongst the Millennial generation, various temple activities including trekking, walking along trails, mediation, yoga etc allow Millennials to separate themselves from the daily hustle-bustle and discover their true purpose in life.

participating in Buddhist Temple Stays in India. Moreover, in tourism studies the usual characteristics to differentiate consumers are gender and age (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2004), however, this study puts forward that there were no noticeable differences in motivations and experiences of male and females participating in Temple Stays (Chun, Roh & Spralls, 2017). For practitioners, researchers and professionals the results of the study would be of interest particularly regarding a number of significant managerial implications. For example, the different motivations identified among visitors can help destination management organisations to formulate efficient destination planning and marketing strategies. It is valuable to understand the behaviour, needs, and likings of tourists so that Temple Stay services and products can be designed to meet the expectations of participants. In a quickly evolving tourism industry, increasing competition between destinations for attracting tourists obscures efforts to develop distinguishable tourism products which are special and unique from other tourism products (Pawitra & Tan, 2003). Thus, tourism professionals and administrators should keep a close eye on the expectations and motivations of different individuals coming for Temple Stays.

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